

Saving life and limb: An investigation into the mental health of student police officers in the UK

A study to gain insight into how student police officers cope with the demands of their role.

Key details

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Police region	East Midlands
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	September 2021
Date due for completion	September 2028

Research context

Student police officers within the UK are in a unique position (Cox and Kirby, 2019). They often study full time, work full time, and have added pressure to complete a portfolio to prove to their force that they are competent at their role to become confirmed in rank.

The introduction of the Police Education Qualification Framework (PEQF), a main function of Policing Vision 2025 and 2030 (Hough and Stanko, 2019), has meant that the way in which student police officers train for their career has transformed.

It is documented that those who work for an emergency service within the UK are more likely to experience poor mental health yet are unlikely to take time off or request help (MIND, 2020; Bell and Eski, 2016). Yet, it is unclear as to whether those who are young in service are even less likely to seek help due to the fear of what may happen during their probation. Those so young in service

may not be aware or have the courage due to shame (Greene-Shortridge, et al., 2007), to engage in support and assume that stress is part of the occupation.

The proposed research will aim to answer the following questions.

- How is the mental health of student police officers being impacted by the demands of their role?
- How aware are student police officers about the signs and symptoms of poor mental health?
- How prominent is poor mental health (stress and anxiety) in student police officers?
- What actions do student police officers take in order to deal with their mental health?
- How does poor mental health in student police officers link to performance at work?
- How can support services help student police officers better manage their mental health?

Research methodology

This research will be using mixed methods in order to confidently establish an in-depth insight into student police officers' mental health.

Initially, a nationwide online survey will be distributed to all serving student officers in all 43 police forces across the UK. The researcher intends to work closely with organisations, charities, and prominent figures in the industry in order to promote the survey. Following this, 15 (theoretical saturation) participants will be selected to undertake three digital video diaries in order to delve into the insights in a qualitative manner.

The participants will be encouraged to use video diaries in order to record their thoughts and feelings over six months. The participants will be encouraged to record interviews at the end of each two months throughout the six months. This enables a longitudinal and ethnographic study to be operated.

This is largely unstructured, with an overarching focus upon mental health and wellbeing each time. Videos will be taken by the participants on Microsoft Teams. They will be recorded and have the ability to edit the footage before it is submitted to the researcher. Content analysis will be utilised in order to examine the verbal and non-verbal cues. The analysis will take place with the participants (where possible) to talk through the videos and how they were feeling at the time that they documented their thoughts.

Video-diaries and digital ethnographic methods offer another promising avenue for mental health research, as they also allow participants to generate a wealth of nonverbal data (Marsano, et al.,

2015: 8).

Research participation

Volunteer student police officers in a UK police force will be required to engage in the initial national survey and will be asked if they wish to take part in a follow-up qualitative study in the form of video diaries.

Tags

- [Mental health](#)
- [PEQF](#)